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THE WINNEBAGO TRIBE

PART I

CHAPTER I

HISTORY

GENERAL REMARKS

At what time the Winnebago entered Wisconsin it is impossible to say. It seems quite reasonable to suppose that they came from the east. If we are right in assuming that they are the builders of the effigy mounds, then we are justified in assigning a certain significance to the distribution of the latter. One of the interesting points of this distribution is that many are found along the shore of Lake Michigan and northward to Two Rivers, that some are found in Rock County, and that they gradually decrease in number as one proceeds north. This would lead us to assume that the Winnebago entered Wisconsin from the south, probably from the southeast. We ought, then, to find effigy mounds in Illinois and, in general, on the route of their probable journey from the east. This is not the case, and it is very difficult to account for their absence unless we assume that all traces of them have disappeared; that the Winnebago first developed their mound-building habit after they had reached Wisconsin; or that the mounds in Illinois are their work (and that of kindred tribes), and finally that the type of mound developed along different lines after they had definitely settled in Wisconsin. It is also possible that since the effigy mounds are undoubtedly closely associated with the clan organization this type of social organization was adopted by the Winnebago only after they entered Wisconsin.

There can be no doubt but that the Winnebago and the closely related tribes like the Missouri, Oto, and Iowa represented the second of the Siouan migrations westward. There were probably four of these migrations, as G. F. Will and H. J. Spinden claim, succeeding each other as follows:

1. Mandan, Hidatsa, Crow.
2. Iowa, Oto, Missouri, Winnebago.

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c. Four lodges once left the main tribe at Prairie du Chien or MacGregor, Wisconsin, and never returned. This happened after all the other tribes had leagued together against the Winnebago. The reason these four lodges left the Winnebago was because they were afraid that war might break out again. Some people believe that the Oto

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FIG. 1.—SECTIONAL MAP OF WISCONSIN, GIVING THE LOCATIONS OF SOME OF THE OLD VILLAGES.

EXPLANATION OF MAP.

[The numbers on the map indicate the locations of some of the Winnebago villages.]

1. Duck Island village, 1834-1835.
2. Portage village, 1787-1832.
3. Black Wolf village, 1829.
4. Fountain village, 1832.
5. Barneburn village, 1700.
6. Rush Lake village.
7. Yellow Thunder village, 1828-32.
8. Speed village, 1827.
9. Old Gray-headed Decorah village, 1720.
10. Big Foot village, 1832.
11. Waterloo village.
12. Four Walker village.
13. Little Priest village, 1832.
Whirling Thunder village, 1832.
14. Kanyamanee village, 1832.
15. Spotted Arm village.
16. Dayton village.
17. White Crow village, 1832.
18. Chamberlain village, 1832.
White Cry village, 1832.
19. Old Gray-headed Decorah village, 1720-1828.
20. Yellow Thunder village.
21. Kanyamanee village, 1828-32.
22. Speed village, 1827.
23. Waukingtom Decorah village, 1832.
24. Standard Decorah village, 1787.
Open-eyed Decorah village, 1832.
25. Little Decorah village, 1827.
26. Big Hawk village, Pine Lake.

are this last branch, for they speak the same language with but few differences and use many old words that the Winnebago employed long ago but have now given up.

d. Some lodges left the tribe never to return. Some say there were four, others give different numbers (of long lodges). Some say only one lodge. My uncle used to say that there were four. "I think that it is believed that they went to the east," he said.

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of possibly the year 1669. There is no record to say how many years before, though it was doubtless several years, for 50 years before La Potherie published his history Allouez had told the same story of the destruction of the Winnebago by the Illinois:

"About 30 years ago all the people of this nation were killed or taken captive by the Iliniouek with the exception of a single man, who escaped, shot through the body with an arrow."

This would place the event in about the year 1640.

He adds that when the captives were permitted to return to their homes this one was made a "Captain of his Nation," as having never been a slave. Shea commenting on this disastrous defeat of the Winnebago says, "If this strange event took place at all, we must ascribe it to an earlier date than 1639 (1634), when visited by Nicolet, who "found them prosperous, and we can hardly suppose a tribe almost annihilated and then restored to its former numbers in 30 years." . . . Nicolet, it will be remembered, was sent to this then unknown region for the purpose of "making peace" between the Winnebago and the Hurons. As the Winnebago were strong enough to command that attention from Governor Champlain, Doctor Shea is quite correct in supposing the Winnebago to have been "a prosperous tribe" in 1634. The events mentioned in the foregoing accounts are not historical, but traditional, for assuredly they did not take place after the coming of Nicolet, as he was followed by other white men in such short periods as to make it impossible for the occurrence of these stirring events to go unrecorded by others.

Charlevoix visited the tribe in 1720, and though a historian of note in old Canada, records the occurrence as history, though we have shown it to have taken place, if at all, more than a century before he went among them. He possibly got the story from the records of Allouez, made a half century before, though it may have been a riverside or cabin story heard by him at the time of his visit to this frontier of New France. He says:

"The Outagamis, who are commonly called Foxes, formerly lived on the shores of the bay . . . but they were attacked by the Illinois, who slew great numbers of them; the rest took refuge on the river of the Outagamis (Fox River), which empties into the end of the bay. They settled upon the shores of a sort of lake (Lake Winnebago)."

Charlevoix . . . adds another disaster not mentioned by the other old writers. In this same narrative he records that "sometime after" the Winnebago had settled on Lake Winnebago:

"They undertook to revenge the defeat which they had suffered from the Illinois. Six hundred of their best men embarked to seek their enemy; but while they were crossing Lake Michigan they were surprised by a furious gale, which caused them all to perish."[4]

The Winnebago still tell of these events and practically in the same words as Perrot obtained them, as can be learned from the following versions obtained in 1910.

a. When the Winnebago first originated, they were holy and clever. They were equal to the spirits. In those days there lived a Winnebago who could fly like a bird, one who could fly as far as four days' journey from the village. There was another Winnebago who could scent anything as far away as four days' journey from the village. Then there was one man who could talk with the trees. They told him many things. Finally there was one who could transform himself into a buffalo. On account of these four men, it was

[4] Op. cit., pp. 89-92.

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CHAPTER II

WINNEBAGO ARCHEOLOGY

General Problems

172 One of the most interesting and important features of the area occupied by the Winnebago is the large number of earth mounds found. That these mounds were made by the Winnebago or the Sioux there seems to be little doubt. The participation of the Sioux in the construction of these earth mounds seems, however, to have been confined entirely to the so-called linear and conical types. The effigy mounds seem to have been the work of the Winnebago exclusively[1] (figs. 2, 3).

The first really serious study of the Wisconsin mounds was made by I. A. Lapham in 1850, and his work must be considered of considerable importance still, by reason of the admirable plats of mounds long since leveled. The next discussion is found in Cyrus Thomas's Report on the Mound Explorations,[2] but he makes no attempt to explain them. Our first accurate knowledge dates from the inception of the Wisconsin Archeologist in 1901. Any attempt to study the archeology of Wisconsin will necessarily have to be based on material there published. An extremely useful and suggestive summary of the data has been made by A. B. Stout. This little pamphlet and that on the Koshkonong region[3] by the same author are of prime importance in the study of Winnebago archeology.

In order to understand the archeology of this region clearly it will be best to say a few words about the regions which were the early habitations of the Winnebago and the tribes that were their immediate neighbors.

[131] The Winnebago, when first found, were inhabiting the southern shore of Green Bay, Wis. Whether, at this time, they already extended farther south and west, it is impossible to say. The tradi-

[1] Cf. Radin, "Some Aspects of Winnebago Archeology," Amer. Anthropologist, n. s., vol. 13, no. 4, 1911. Prof. Dixon in his article on "Some Aspects of North American Archeology," Amer. Anthropologist, n. s., vol. 15, no. 1, 1913, accepts this conclusion. "The association of the effigy mounds of Wisconsin and the adjacent area with the Winnebago or other Siouan tribes seems now reasonably certain, and one might therefore naturally regard the Serpent mound and the few others of this effigy type in the Ohio Valley as due also to tribes of the same stock," p. 552.

[2] Twelfth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, pp. 47-55, Washington, 1894.

[3] "Prehistoric Earthworks in Wisconsin," Ohio Archæological and Historical Quarterly, vol. 23, no. 1, Columbus, 1914; and "The Archæology of the Lake Koshkonong Region," Wisconsin Archeologist, vol. 1, no. 3, 1902.

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The traditions speak only of Green Bay as their original habitat. On the other shore of Green Bay were the Menominee, who likewise have no recollection of having lived anywhere else. To the northeast, along Door Peninsula, were the Potawatomi, unquestionably intruders, who had come by way of Mackinaw. To the southwest lay the Sauk and Fox, the closely related Kickapoo, and the enigmatic Mascoutin. Finally,

FIG. 2.—MAP OF WISCONSIN, SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF CIRCULAR MOUNDS.

to the south lay the Miami. Such seems to have been the distribution of the tribes around Green Bay and Lake Michigan at the first advent of the whites. Within 50 years of the landing of Nicollet the places were entirely shifted. Winnebago villages are found scattered all along the Fox River and Lake Winnebago, the Sauk and Fox and Kickapoo are on their way farther south, and the Potawatomi are in possession of the southern shore of Green Bay and the western shore of Lake Michigan. Later still we find the Winnebago extending all

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167 along the Wisconsin River and west of it to the Mississippi, and, at the
131 same time, occupying the territory south of Lake Winnebago through the region of the Four Lakes, the shores of Lake Koshkonong and farther down along the Rock River into Illinois. Their eastern boundary was determined by the Potawatomi.

172 Let us return now to the distribution of the mounds. Of the three kinds of mounds found in Wisconsin, the conical and oval ones are the

FIG 1.—MAP OF WISCONSIN, SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF EFFIGY MOUNDS.

commonest, and they are met with in practically every county of the State in which records have been made. They have also been found in Minnesota. The so-called effigy mounds, on the other hand, have never been found north of a line drawn through the southern boundary of Lincoln County. They have, however, been found in every area which the Winnebago occupied at one time or another,

4:Smith N-5 (1928) 1929 NP12 Winnebago NP12

114 126 junction with the Mississippi. Dr. Evan D. Pierce, of Trempealeau, who was in charge of the park, was much interested in the native flora as well as in archeology, and we made a collection of ninety species then in bloom. Mr. Towne L. Miller, of Fairwater, Wisconsin, Honorary Curator of Archeology of the Museum collected the plants of the region throughout the season, for the Department of Botany.

● 131 361 The Winnebago Indians are found today scattered over the central part of Wisconsin, principally in Marquette, Waushara, Portage, Sauk, Juneau, Adams, Marathon, Wood, Clark, Jackson, and Monroe counties. Wood County with permanent settlements in Arpin, Vesper, Pittsville, Walker, Elm Lake, Dexterville, and Babcock, contains the largest number, about 750. Along the Hemlock River, not far from Pittsville, are found other large settlements of farming Winnebago. In other counties good-sized settlements are located at Neillsville, Wittenberg, Wyeville, Black River Falls, Hatfield, and Tomah. Their Indian agency and school are located at the last mentioned city.

114 123 Our chief location during the summer was at A. White's farm, on the Walker Road, six and a half miles south of Wisconsin Rapids. When we arrived, Mr. White was at Kilbourn where many of the Winnebago camp during the tourist season, making baskets and bead work, and taking part in dances and entertainments. Jim Henniger and his wife, our pageant friends, were there, caring for her father, Dave Dekorah, a prominent man in the medicine lodge, who was sick. He afterwards died and was buried in their community graveyard, with Indian ceremony. The Whites made us welcome and we pitched our tent in a grove of white pines not far from their spring. There were several other Winnebago Indians near at hand, including Henry Dick, from Briggsville. Henry is important in the medicine society and immediately made friends with us and started to teach us the Winnebago language. He was especially bitter against the peyote cult, which many Winnebago have embraced, declaring that peyote was worse than whiskey, because a man drunk on whiskey, would be sober the next morning and able to go to work, whereas with peyote, he became "crazy", and would not work for four or five days while under its influence. He further said that the peyote cult worshippers never possess anything, but live on their industrious neighbors who belong to the medicine lodge. These medicine lodge Indians raise potatoes, corn, beans, carrots, hay, grain, hogs and chickens, according to Henry, and would not let their own people starve, but did not like the shiftlessness of the peyote worshippers. He wished he could see the President of the United States to tell him not to let any Indian have peyote. He thinks bad days are coming to the peyote-eating Indians. A few years ago, this cactus drug, most of which comes from Texas, sold for $4.00 a thousand buttons, but the current prices in 1928 were $25 per thousand of number one size; $30.00 per thousand for number two size; and

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7: Radin E-5 (ca. 1912) 1926 NP12 Winnebago NP12

Preface

There is only one way—to have a native himself give the account in his own mother tongue. The problem then resolves itself into finding the native. That is the task I set myself and through a piece of good luck I succeeded in accomplishing it. As the manner of its accomplishment is an interesting and illuminating story in itself, I hope I shall be excused for telling it in some detail.

In the year 1909 I commenced field investigations among the Winnebago Indians living on the Nebraska side of the Missouri River, about twenty-five miles south of Sioux City, Iowa. These Indians had the reputation of being fairly conservative. Perhaps the fact that a Presbyterian mission had in seventeen years succeeded in converting only one family, and a family which then unkindly died without leaving issue, may bear this out.

Among these Indians there lived a family named Blow Snake, consisting of a father and a fair number of children all grown up. Two of these were men quite well known in the tribe for a variety of reasons. These two became my principal informants. They had lived the most exciting of lives, for to the usual round of adventures that fall to the lot of most Indians of that region now, they had added a murder and a conversion, the murder first and the conversion afterwards. The older of the two seemed to be by far the more gifted. His memory was simply prodigious. He recounted to me a ceremony which took him two months, working practically six hours a day, to tell

*159 221 [223] good shot and I was greatly his inferior. He often killed pheasants.

*159 648 526 Whenever the older people went to town circulating petitions for help we youngsters always went along. We always took our bows and arrows with us for the Whites wanted to see how well we could shoot. Often they placed five-cent pieces on some object at a considerable distance and had us shoot at them. We generally hit a number. I would also let my brother shoot at twenty-five cent pieces that I held between my fingers and he never hit my fingers. We would often make as much as five dollars in this way and this money we always gave to our parents.

*159 22 [131] [861] In summer the Winnebago would return to Black River Falls (Wisconsin). We used to go out with our bows and arrows and stay out all day. At evening when we returned we of course always expected to get a scolding and we therefore had a good excuse ready. It really would have been much better had we returned earlier in the day, but we were enjoying ourselves so much hunting that night overtook us when we were still a long distance from home. Often we would not eat anything at all all day, but to that we were accustomed. Sometimes we would go fishing on a stream nearby, forget all about the time, and then return home very late. We got a scolding then even although we had a good excuse.

[P.88]